

Prospecting

Now is the time for that chat with your travel agent. You have studied your products and determined which are the best export candidates. Next, you matched the probable demand for those products in a number of possible target countries and then profiled the market in each of the target countries you earmarked to narrow the choice to the one country that combines the greatest number of marketing criteria necessary for success. But so far it has been an academic exercise, paperwork.

Visit the selected country for first-hand, personal confirmation of the accuracy of your market profile.

The moment of truth has arrived. Now you must visit the selected country for first-hand, personal confirmation of the accuracy of your market profile. Is the niche you saw for your product really there? Are there importers eager and able to accept your product? Is the economic, social, cultural and political environment what you thought it was? Is there competition you hadn't foreseen and can you meet it? Will the product or your marketing strategy have to be amended to win needed customer support? If so, will the cost of these changes still permit you an acceptable return on your investment? Are there any unanticipated problems to be overcome or

opportunities to be taken advantage of? To find out, a personal prospecting trip to the country is required. Your homework has prepared you to make a realistic assessment of the market for your products and services; so put on your travelling shoes and start assessing.

There's perhaps no better way for you, as a novice exporter, to start than by visiting an international trade fair in your product sector. A few days spent at a trade fair will give you a good look at and a real feel for the products and the prices you will be competing against, the style and sophistication of your competitors' sales and promotion methods. International trade fairs are meeting places for the world's buyers and sellers and for the agents and distributors who bring the two together. Not only will you find a trade fair a very efficient and effective way of testing the waters in a new environment, you may even make an on-the-spot sale or two. At the very least, visiting a trade fair should provide you with a list of contacts you probably couldn't match in several individual prospecting trips. But before you finalize your travel plans, a word of warning: travel fatigue can be fatal to effectiveness. Limit your trip to no more than two weeks in no more than two countries. In taking on too much too soon, you risk returning home with a mind and notebooks bulging with disconnected facts and figures, confused and unrelated recollections which can result in costly mistakes.

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Assistance in selecting, planning for and funding your attendance at an international trade fair is available from a number of federal and provincial trade development agencies. (See *The players* section)